

III. Recreational Activities and Water Supply Compatibility

The Metropolitan District Commission Division of Watershed Management must carefully weigh the potential for impacts to the drinking water supply and other environmental resources before considering any uses on its properties. In general, any human use will cause impacts. The job for MDC/DWM is to determine what uses may be allowed in which areas in order to limit potential water quality impacts to acceptable levels. Because the Division purchases and maintains its lands for water supply protection, it must err on the side of caution in identifying uses that compromise water supply protection. MDC/DWM must consider:

- Type and intensity of proposed public access use.
- The physical features of the area being considered for public activities.
- The potential for impacts to water quality from the entire spectrum of visitors.
- The resource needs to properly manage any particular use on its properties, always mindful of the primary mission of the Division – water supply protection.

The criteria to determine whether an activity is compatible with the Division's water supply mission identifies whether the activity has the potential to degrade the quality of water in the watershed or to degrade any natural resource within the watershed. MDC/DWM must consider the following information in making such a determination:

- Division of Watershed Management goals, and guiding legislation and regulations.
- Environmental impacts to water quality and land resources.
- Potential for impacts to watershed resources and waterworks infrastructure.
- Potential impacts to staffing and other resources.
- The safety of users, abutters, staff, and general public safety.

The sections that follow discuss numerous recreation activities and evaluate them using the criteria outlined above. Unless noted otherwise, 350 CMR 11.09(2) are the regulations that the MDC administers concerning public access on Division of Watershed Management property (**see Appendix B**). As stated previously, because the Division purchases and maintains its lands for drinking water supply protection, it must err on the side of caution in restricting or prohibiting uses that may be incompatible with drinking water supply protection.

A. Water Contact Activities

Direct water contact activities by humans, such as swimming and wading, pose an established threat to the water supply and to public safety. The link between water contact activities and the spread of water-borne disease is well-documented. These activities are prohibited by regulation.

B. Boating (Motorized and Non-motorized)

All boating activities, both motorized and non-motorized, are prohibited by current regulations in the Wachusett Reservoir watershed, except in areas specifically designated by the Commission. Although boating poses less of a threat to the water supply than swimming, it is still considered an unnecessary threat to a water supply due to the likelihood of water contact. Boating on the Wachusett Reservoir would require a managed program to protect public safety; managing these activities would divert MDC resources from programs directly linked with water supply protection. Private boats also have the potential to introduce or perpetuate exotic and/or nuisance vegetation. Boating activities are prohibited on MDC waters in the Wachusett Reservoir watershed with the exception of West Waushacum Pond and water bodies in the Tributary Headwaters Zone that are capable of handling non-motorized boats.

C. Fishing

Shoreline fishing is currently allowed in the Wachusett Reservoir watershed, with a fishing season that runs from April until November each year. Shoreline fishing, without water contact, in certain areas and for a limited period of time, does not pose a significant threat to the water supply or other natural resources. Fishing with waders is allowed along streams in particular areas of the Wachusett Reservoir watershed where appropriate access can be gained and public safety concerns are not significant.

D. Off-Road Driving (Off-Road Vehicles (ORVs), All-Terrain Vehicles (ATVs))

This recreational activity has been prohibited by regulation on all MDC/DWM lands in all of its watersheds since 1989. This prohibition is based on significant documentation of the erosion impacts associated with ORV and ATV use, and observations of these effects on non-MDC lands on the Ware River watershed. The prohibition of these activities on MDC lands in the Wachusett Reservoir watershed is not likely to change.

E. Snowmobiling

Snowmobiling has been prohibited by regulation in the Wachusett Reservoir watershed since 1996. Snowmobile use was allowed on a trial basis prior to 1996 in a small section of the Wachusett Reservoir watershed. The agency, however, found considerable damage to the land and users were straying from the marked paths. The prohibition of snowmobiling on MDC lands in the Wachusett Reservoir watershed is not likely to change. Enforcement of this policy is an on-going need, as evidenced by continued illegal snowmobile activity throughout the watershed. The MDC does allow snowmobiling on designated trails within the Ware River watershed (see www.state.ma.us/mdc/wracsnow.pdf).

F. Horseback Riding

Horseback riding is prohibited by regulation on all MDC watershed lands, except on designated trails that are within the Ware River watershed (see www.state.ma.us/mdc/wrachorse.pdf). Horseback riding is extremely limited due to the threat of fecal coliform contamination and the potential of other pathogens associated with domestic animal manures, as well as the increased potential for erosion of access roads.

The close proximity of MDC/DWM property to tributaries and reservoirs in the Wachusett Reservoir watershed does not allow adequate buffers between horse trails and the water resources. The additional road maintenance required to mitigate erosion impacts from horseback riding would further compromise the limited resources available to the Division for watershed protection.

G. Dogs and Other Pets

Bringing any animal onto MDC watershed lands is prohibited by regulation except where horses and dogs are authorized at limited areas of the Ware River watershed. Dogs and other domestic animals are sources of fecal contamination and can carry *Giardia* and *Cryptosporidium*; these parasites can spread to wildlife populations and ultimately into the water supply.

There are two exceptions to the domestic pet rules. Dog walking is allowed on MDC/DWM land below the Wachusett Dam, an area that is technically off-watershed because it does not drain into the reservoir. Dogs are also allowed for hunting purposes on MDC/DWM lands in the Wachusett Reservoir watershed. There is historic precedent for the use of hunting dogs on significant areas of land recently purchased by the MDC. The current minor utilization of hunting dogs (see **Appendix A**), combined with the relatively short time-frame of hunting season and the ability to track users through the MDC special hunting permit process, poses a minor threat to water quality. People seeking the opportunity to walk their dog have other, non-MDC land options in the watershed.

H. Camping

Camping is prohibited by regulation on MDC property. Camping tends to generate larger amounts of trash than hiking and walking. In addition, camping creates human sanitation problems. There are serious water quality concerns associated with deposition of human fecal matter close to tributaries and reservoirs.

Given the lack of sanitary facilities and the significant needs of resource allocation for administration, maintenance, and enforcement, the MDC considers camping inappropriate and it will remain an unauthorized activity in the Wachusett Reservoir watershed.

I. Hunting, Trapping

MDC/DWM regulations prohibit hunting and trapping, except at times and in areas designated by MDC. Hunting arrangements consistent with policy established at Quabbin Reservoir, where hunting is allowed during all state hunting seasons in headwaters lands, should not impact watershed resources in the Wachusett Reservoir watershed. The MDC/DWM found no significant impacts during a two year trial hunting program in the Wachusett Reservoir watershed Tributary Headwaters Zone. Continuation of the program, which requires a valid Massachusetts hunting license and an MDC Special Use permit to hunt on MDC/DWM lands, does not pose a significant threat to water quality.

J. Hiking, Nature Study, Bird Watching, Snowshoeing

Hiking, walking, nature study, bird watching, and snowshoeing are currently allowed throughout the Wachusett Reservoir watershed except in those areas surrounding the Intake Protection Zone. Hiking has relatively minor impact to water quality, unless those walking bring along dogs (see above). Walking on the surface of the Reservoir when frozen is strictly forbidden.

MDC land holdings within the Wachusett Reservoir watershed are surrounded by various parcels of public and private open space. Providing trail connections to adjacent open space areas, where appropriate, will be incorporated into the recommendations in Section V. For example, the MDC/DWM has been actively involved with the Wachusett Greenways organization in developing a regional rail trail. Areas where access must be limited in order to adequately protect water supply and other watershed resources will not be opened to provide trail connections.

K. Bicycle Riding

Regulations restrict off-road bicycle riding to designated areas of MDC/DWM property. The intensive use of trails for biking, if not properly constructed or maintained on a regular basis, can cause severe erosion. Excessive soil erosion has been documented on MDC's metropolitan Boston Reservations where mountain bicycle use occurs. Heavy bicycle usage can also be incompatible with walking and nature observation. Additional policing is needed to monitor both permitted bicycling and illegal off-trail riding, prevent erosion, and ensure the safety of other trail users.

The 1996 Plan allowed bicycle riding in the Tributary headwaters Zone and on the Off-Watershed Lands Zone, with a MDC permit. Specific areas were designated in 1998 for mountain biking. Opportunities for biking have also been expanded by construction of the Mass Central Rail Trail, much of which runs through MDC/DWM property. Due to limited resources for management of public access, recreational use, and user conflicts, MDC is not in favor of adding designated areas for bicycle use on MDC/DWM lands in the Wachusett Reservoir watershed.

L. Cross-Country Skiing

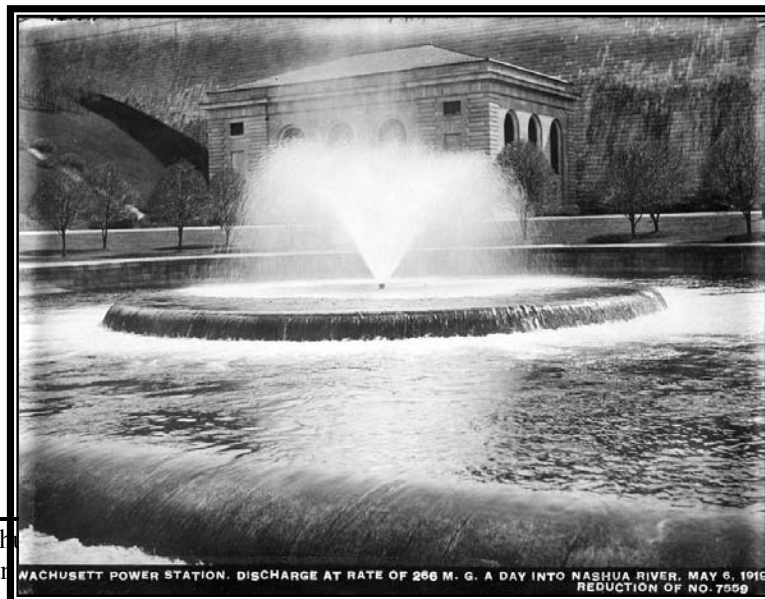
MDC policy allows cross-country skiing in all areas that are open for hiking in the Wachusett Reservoir watershed except along the Promenade at the top of Wachusett Dam. Skiing is prohibited over the reservoir's frozen surface.

M. Picnicking

MDC regulations do not prohibit picnicking on Wachusett Reservoir watershed lands. Since picnicking is an ambiguous term, it should be noted that MDC's regulations prohibit the use of fire, any cooking activity, and alcoholic beverages on all watershed lands under the care and control of the MDC. All trash from picnic activity is the sole responsibility of the individual(s) involved and cannot be left on MDC property. The public must also assume responsibility for proper sanitation, as there will be a limited number of temporary toilet facilities available six months of the year for public use.

N. Other Activities

The activities presented in this section and in Table 3 are not an extensive inventory of recreational activities, rather they are the most common outdoor pursuits and/or those that may present the most serious harm to water quality. All activities that are permitted by the MDC are identified in this plan. Any activity not mentioned in this document should be presumed to be prohibited on MDC/DWM property in the Wachusett Reservoir watershed. The MDC may enter into lease agreements for use of the Division's property that may differ from MDC/DWM policies. Any such contract between the MDC and other parties will dictate allowed uses and any applicable actions necessary to protect water quality. Questions concerning an activity not cited in this plan should be directed to the Wachusett/Sudbury Watershed Rangers at (978) 365-3800.



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